

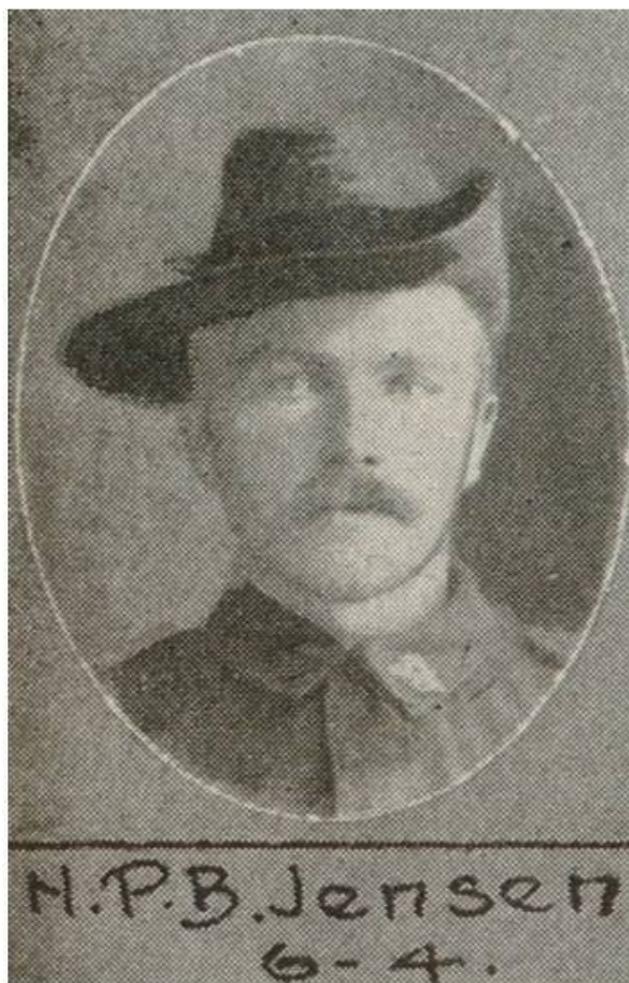
Stories from the Honour Boards

Stories of those who served and are remembered on the Honour Boards in the Merrington Anzac Memorial Peace Chapel at Saint Andrew's Uniting Church

Booklet Number 134

NIELS PEDER BERG JENSEN

1892 - 1918



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Please see a Guide if you would like a copy.

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Corner Ann and Creek Streets
Brisbane QLD 4000
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Corporal Niels (Neil) Peder Berg Jensen

Merchant seaman, cattle drover, military airman – Niels ('Neil') Peder Berg Jensen had a roving and varied life in his relatively short span of 26 years.

Born in Denmark in 1892, Neil worked as a merchant seaman until 1913, and then took up cattle droving in Australia. In 1916, having been naturalised, he enlisted in the Australian Flying Corps, but died in a plane crash at Ramleh in Palestine in May 1918.

His remains were interred in the Ramleh War Cemetery (grave reference CC.56).

The sea



Georg Stage
1882

Niels – or Neil as he became known in Australia – was born in Denmark on 6 March 1892. His father was Jens Christian Jensen, and he had at least one brother, Jens Peder Jensen.

When aged 15 Neil went to the Danish training ship *Georg Stage*, and after three months received a certificate. He then worked as an able seaman. On 11 December 1913 Neil arrived on the *Port Jackson* at the port of Wallaroo in South Australia, and apparently decided to try his hand at something quite different.

The land

The something different was working as a drover with the cattle at Mundowdna Station in the north east of South Australia. Mundowdna was on the Frome River, about 20km south east of Marree, and had been purchased by 'Cattle-King' Sidney Kidman in 1906 because of its location at the southern end of the Birdsville Track and proximity to the railway terminus at Marree.

Neil applied for naturalisation as an Australian in mid-February 1916 in Adelaide, with the process including an oath of allegiance before a magistrate, swearing 'that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty King George V, his heirs and successors according to law.' In addition, the postmaster at Farina (south of Mundowdna) vouchsafed in writing that Neil was a person of good repute. A particular catalyst for the application was a desire to enlist in the AIF. He asked that his application be fast tracked - 'I am down from the North to enlist, and the finances is not as the best. I am medical fit'.

Neil's naturalisation was approved on 2 March 1916, but he had left Adelaide by then, and actually enlisted on 7 July 1916 in Cloncurry, Queensland (having to pay half a crown for his naturalisation to be confirmed to the local authorities). He gave his religion as Lutheran and his occupation as drover. He was 175cms tall, weighed 73kg, had blue eyes, a fresh complexion, and tan coloured hair.

As next-of-kin Neil gave Miss Beatrice Quin, of Lady Musgrave Lodge in Sherbet Street, Brisbane. That address suggests that Beatrice was either a recently arrived migrant, or a migrant who was having difficulty finding ongoing employment. The puzzle is how and when she and Neil met.

The Lady Musgrave Lodge Trust was founded in 1885, under the leadership of the then Governor's wife. The purpose of the Trust was to provide safe and secure accommodation for immigrant women. A particular goal was to assist servant girls who had been discharged by their employers and had no other residence and limited skills, so in addition to accommodation, the Trust arranged training for the women where required.

Shipping records show a Beatrice Quin, aged 18 and a domestic servant, departed London on 31 March 1915 for Brisbane.

This may be the Beatrice Quin who Neil Jensen nominated as his next-of-kin (and later the beneficiary of his will), but there are no records indicating whether or not he was in Brisbane before July 1916; nor of whether Beatrice was on a property in rural Australia before then (although after Lady Musgrave Lodge she spent time on three Queensland properties - Moscow Station and Middleton Park in the Winton district, and Kinbombi Station via the Kingaroy Line).

The air

Placed with the 3rd reinforcements for the Australian Flying Corps No.1 Squadron, Neil embarked in Melbourne on the HMAS *Ulysses* on 25 October 1916.

He disembarked in Suez on 3 December 1916 and was taken on strength as a rigger. Riggers were responsible for the maintenance of the aircraft wings, struts, bracing wires and fuselage, including battle repairs.

In 1917 and 1918 No.1 Squadron supported the British and Dominion advance into Palestine by undertaking a range of roles – reconnaissance, photography, ground attack and liaison missions, and fighting off aerial German adversaries.

Neil went to the school of aerial gunnery in August 1917, qualifying as an aerial machine gunner, and on 1 January 1918 was promoted to Corporal (Aerial gunner).



Corporal Jensen with twin Lewis guns in the observer's seat of a Bristol fighter

No.1 Squadron was re-equipped with Bristol Fighters over the January to March 1918 period. These planes were viewed very positively by the aircrews. Among the advantages was that the pilot had a Vickers gun firing forward, and the observer had a Lewis gun – although the Australians quickly added a second Lewis gun - to deal with attacks from the rear. Although called a fighter, these Bristols were also well adapted for long range reconnaissance and for photography.

On 12 January 1918 he made a will in favour of Beatrice Quin.

In late April 1918 the Australian Light Horse took part in what is known as the Es Salt raids, east of the Jordan River, and staged a withdrawal back to the Jordan on 3 and 4 May 1918. No.1 Squadron was keen to provide support in what was likely to be a difficult retreat, and planes took off in the morning of 3 May on this mission.

Neil was in the observer's seat of a Bristol Fighter piloted by Jack Keith Curwen-Walker – an experienced pilot who had joined the AFC at its commencement, and was regarded as bold and enthusiastic.

Impatience to help protect the Light Horsemen may have been behind the fatal crash that morning that killed both Neil and Jack Curwen-Walker. One witness wrote:

During morning between 10 and 11 o'clock...engine of flying Machine was not running satisfactorily, he alighted and changed into another machine (a Bristol Fighter) he tried to ascend too quickly and steeply, his machine stalled and crashed into the top of the aerodrome at Ramleh about 8 miles from Jaffa, killing him instantly, also Neil Jensen, the gunner who was in the machine with him. He was buried in a cemetery near where he fell. There is a cross on the grave. Both men were buried near one another in same cemetery.



**In Memory of
Corporal NIELS PETER BERG JENSEN**

**506, Australian Flying Corps
who died
on 03 May 1918**

**Remembered with honour
RAMLEH WAR CEMETERY**



Aftermath

Neil's name is recorded on the Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, and also on one of the Honour Boards and a brass plaque in Saint Andrew's Church (corner of Ann and Creek Streets) Brisbane.

The connection of Neil and/or Beatrice with Saint Andrew's is not clear. Perhaps Beatrice attended when she was living in Spring Hill at Lady Musgrave Lodge, or someone associated with Saint Andrew's such as Deaconess May Walker gave support to Beatrice, but this is speculation.

The Will that Neil had made in January 1918, and the assistance of a solicitor, meant that Beatrice received his personal effects and his estate in 1918. However, after the war his medals and the inscription plate from his temporary wooden cross at the Ramleh War Cemetery were sent to his father as 'lineal next-of-kin'.

In the Brisbane Courier of 3 May 1919 appeared a notice inserted by Beatrice Quin that read:

In loving memory of my dear friend, Cpl. Neil Peder Berg Jensen, who was accidentally killed in an aeroplane accident in Palestine, May 3, 1918.

*So he passed through pain and sorrow
Till he sank in death to rest
Earth's rejected, God's elected
Gained a portion with the blest
(Memoria in eterna.)*

Two days later Beatrice posted an advertisement:

Young girl would like to hear of any one requiring assistance on voyage to England (any capacity), in return for passage or part passage. Apply Beatrice Quin c/o Mrs McDougall, Middleton Park Station, via Winton.

Whether or not Beatrice succeeded in returning home to England has not been possible to ascertain, but there is no obvious record of her remaining in Queensland. We can but hope that she found happiness later, wherever she was.



Neil Jensen 1917

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Written by Ian Carnell.

Buderim

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Lest we forget